
THE POCAHONTAS TIMES

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CALVIN W. PRICE, EDITOR.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1929

(A paper prepared for a meeting of
the Jefferson Historical Society, at
Charles Town, October 26, 1929.)

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A historical subject being appropriate for an occasion of this kind your careful attention is requested for a short study of the Minute Men of the Revolution. History is a fruitful topic to speak about but hard to listen to. The Minute Men belonged to Virginia and more especially to the Fairfax demesne. To the people who lived on the land between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers, and especially to those who lived in and near the mountains. Possibly when Charles the First granted the Fairfax manor, he had no idea as to the extent of the domain that he was given into private ownership. It was more than twenty years after that king was executed that John Lederer made his first exploration, and on his third expedition he reached the mountain at some point west of the first gap in the Blue Ridge south of the Potomac River passage in that mountain. He turned to retrace his steps at some high peak of the Alleghenies which he named Mount Charles. This in 1670, in the reign of Charles the Second. As we know now the Fairfax grant comprised twenty-two counties under the name of the Northern Neck.

It was in this territory with the meeting place at Culpeper Court House that the first body of Minute Men assembled and organized a regiment in the spring of 1775. Northern historians later were moved to claim the name for the soldiers of New England and they played upon the harp so continuously and so long that they have almost obtained a title to it by possession. As a matter of fact the name of Minute Men and their startling and distinctive flag were not adopted by the northern colonies and until long after the Revolution and the name and record belonged to Virginia alone.

My mature conclusion is that New England historians will steal any glory found lying loose. That we West Virginians who were too proud to boast have been well nigh relegated into obscurity. That we should wake up and do justice to our fighting forebears and see that their name and fame do not perish from the earth.

It was at Concord that the shot was fired that was heard round the world. It was not the first shot by the way but still it was a shot. And the New England writers do solemnly assert that these were the minute men of that momentous year that fired the shots at Lexington and Concord. It was a good fight and worthy of all the honor and glory that it has received. It was not fought by minute men however.

And to impress upon you that so far as history is concerned it is not so much what a hero does as to how it is recorded, that gives him a place in history. You can go anywhere in all this broad land with its hundred million educated citizens and you will find that the name of only one man who participated in the Lexington and Concord affair is known to the people as a whole. Not one tenth of one percent of the persons of mature age know the name of more than one of those soldiers, and that name is Paul Revere, the night rider. Inquire into what this faithful man did to earn undying fame. This is what he did: On a clear, moonlight night in April he rode a well gaited horse sixteen miles over a country road to carry a message that the march of the British troops had begun. He carried the message and did his duty and it relieved him of the danger of standing in the firing line. It was an important message and they sent a man with him who rode with Paul Revere and had an equal part in that service that night. His name is practically unknown to the country at large. Only the researcher is able to dig it out of the record. The message was entrusted to William Dawes and Paul Revere rode with him.

The minute men movement was probably the most important and far reaching of all the innovations of the experiment in liberty as voiced by the Declaration of Independence.

It is not too much to say that it outlines the military policy of the United States today as it has been from the time of its inception. The theory of the minute men as an institution is that every able bodied man is a potential soldier skilled in the use of arms who is on guard every moment of his life, attending to his usual occupation but ready at all times to defend his country.

The word militia that was sought to be used in its place does not adequately describe this peculiar American institution of every man a potential fighter who lives in peace. We have the standing army. That is an old world institution. We see a soldier of this salaried branch but seldom. There are just enough of them to form a nucleus in time of war. Another important branch is the militia which is a name sacred to the organizations within the states and may be designated as that body of soldiers not on regular payroll but who each is furnished with standard arms and a uniform. The great body of the army is composed of some eighteen or twenty millions able men between the ages of eighteen years and forty-five years who go about their daily work but who are subject to be called any minute that they are needed. These are the true minute men.

It was given a test in the World War and the plan worked perfectly well.

At the date of the uprising against Great Britain, there had been accomplished in America a state of preparedness or a kind of power never before known in the world, and that was a race of men accustomed to the use of arms. There has never been a subordinate class among the white people of the United States. There is no peasant. Perhaps the spirit of

the time might be conjectured from the last words of George Washington. History says that his last words were: "I look forward to the event with perfect resignation." What he did say was a mutter in delirium: "Never trust a nigger with a gun." It is needless to say that the time has come with the improvement of the ages that all classes and conditions of citizens of the United States are to be trusted with guns, and it is upon the thought of our able bodied fighting men, of whatever color or creed, that we lie down each night in peace and safety.

It is perhaps better entitled to the designation of preparedness. Loyalty, courage, strength and the use of weapons of precision may be better learned in the home than in the barracks.

The policy of minute men for defense was apparent to John Randolph, whose advent in Congress in 1799, was the beginning of the plan on which our military defense is founded. He was against the professional soldier. He said that to be safe, citizen and soldier must be synonymous terms. The danger of military despotism at home was far more dangerous to a free state than foreign dangers. Beginning at that time, the policy of this country of a small standing army has proved to be wise. John Randolph said that the armings and counter armings of the old countries had raised national debts to astonishing amounts and sent their laborers supperless to bed. He said of the minute men of Virginia, that they were raised in a minute, armed in a minute, marched in a minute, fought in a minute, and vanquished in a minute.

America, that is the United States, taught the world to spend the amount of a great military budget on the public schools, and this is one of the great lessons that she has taught the world. All arguments for disarming are based on the experience of the United States.

The institution of minute men as such dates from the time that Patrick Henry, the radical, looked to the mountains for the fighting men who were not yet quite ripe in the lowlands. Patrick Henry went on to Philadelphia to attend the session of the Continental Congress, and arranged for the assembling of a small army from the woods and hills to meet at Culpeper in the spring of 1775.

There is where the name and the other distinguishing features of the new departure were invented. History is silent as to what man the institution is indebted for its existence, but to my mind it is a fair conjecture that John Marshall, afterwards Chief Justice, is the one that the credit should be given. His was probably the master mind of that assembly. His rank was that of lieutenant, and his father was there as major of the regiment then formed. So it is practically certain that John Marshall had much to do with the details of the organization.

They are remembered now for the name minute men, for the flag that they adopted, for the uniform consisting of the wamum, bucktails in their hats, mountain rifles for the arm, tomahawks and scalping knives in their belts. It is plain to be seen by their dress that they were from the mountains and not from the luxurious low lands. On their hunting coats they had on their bosoms the words "Liberty or Death," and on their flag was a picture of a rattlesnake with twelve rattles, one for each colony, the head to represent Virginia. The rattlesnake was coiled ready to strike. The flag had the word minute men on it with the further designation of Culpeper, and under the serpent were the words, "Don't Tread on Me!"

It was a great fighting unit then formed. Its example was speedily followed by all of the mountain and the Valley counties. When that first regiment marched within a few weeks to the low lands to take possession of the capitol of Virginia at Williamsburg, their warlike and ferocious appearance struck terror to the hearts of the town dwellers. Especially that banner with a strange device. Then it was that soft boned denizens of tide-water counties commenced calling us snakes, from the pictures of the rattlesnake under which our forefathers marched, and finally they have applied it to the people of West Virginia.

For one, I am willing to accept the designation. I am strong for including that rattlesnake and that motto in our State flag. I say unto you that we ought to be proud to have the opportunity of showing that we are the descendants of men who had the guts to march under the rattlesnake and the motto, "Don't Tread on Me!" Wear it like a badge of honor on your bosom. I have one of the old rifles with the brazen serpent on the stock, that is as precious to me as the emblem of a similar brazen serpent under which Moses was able to rescue the spirit of his followers in the wilderness, and which was cherished by the Israelites during the years of their greatest power and strength.

These minute men and other regiments marched to the far north under that flag and under the name of minute men. During the activities of the year 1776, that was the proud and most distinctive flag that floated in the breeze above the patriots. The next year in due course and after deliberation another flag

was adopted, not the flag of to-day, but one in which the same colors predominate. Thus passed from active service one of the most distinctive flags, and one of the boldest banners, that ever brave men flung to the breeze.

In the Revolution, the fighting strength of Virginia was about 45,000 troops maintained for eight years. Of this number perhaps ten thousand were in the armies under Washington on foreign service, that is, in other colonies. The rest were known as militia. But as I explained before the word militia was not then nor is it now a sufficiently comprehensive name to describe the new kind of fighting man then introduced to the world for the first time. It was the man with a gun, ages ranging from 11 years to 80, who were ready to fight. There were two very serious problems at home in Virginia. Thousands of painted warriors appeared on the frontier as allies to the British, and at all times there was danger from the fighting mountain tribes of the Carolinas, whose influence was ranging farther north each year.

One of the earliest companies of minute men to march to the far north was the company formed in the country now occupied by the eastern panhandle by Daniel Morgan. Under Morgan they marched north and reached Quebec by the December, 1775, and joined in the attack on Quebec on December 31, 1775, where they were led by Morgan. From that time until the battle of the Cowpens, January 16, 1776, Morgan was active at home and abroad. He advanced in the service of the continental armies to the rank of general, and he was never defeated. He seems to have had at his command all of the troops of this part of Virginia, whether they were at home or abroad.

It is a historical fact that Virginia had to look to her western border and that she was in far more danger from Indian raids than from any British army.

There is no doubt that the minute men of Virginia from the mountains turned the scale that defeated Cornwallis in the last year of the fighting 1781. They, the minute men, gathered at Kings Mountain and fought and won the battle and came back to their farms. Morgan with less than a 1000 won the battle of the Cowpens. And when as a result of that battle Cornwallis marched to the sea and came to a halt at the mouth of York River, the word was carried from home to home in the mountains that Cornwallis was trapped on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. Then the minute men literally poured out of every pass and marched to the siege of Yorktown and pressed on until the surrender of Cornwallis was received in the fall of 1781. His army marched back to the barracks at Winchester and so the war ended.

Daniel Morgan, "the old wagoner," was a heroic figure in the colonial wars and all through the Revolution. He seemed to be as much at home in Washington's headquarters as in Frederick County, among his neighbors. He was a fierce man. In 1798 when he was 62 years old, he was serving in Congress. Lyon, a member from Vermont, spat on Griswold, a member from Connecticut. The next day when Congress failed to expel Lyon, Griswold cut himself a withe and proceeded to lick the tar out of Lyon. Morgan, an old man, held off all the Congress, the galleries, and the officers, until Griswold had finished beating his opponent.

About as good an illustration of the work of the minute men for neatness and dispatch is the ten day campaign made under Morgan to put down the Tory army in Hardy County, in 1781.

This was an organization of citizens of Hardy County, in response to a request from Lord Cornwallis dealing with two of John Claypole's sons,

who had gone to South Carolina to confer with the British general. It was at a time that British sentiment was so strong in the Carolinas, most so in the mountains. Cornwallis gave both the boys commissions, and sent a colonel's commission to their John Claypole, a rich farmer of Lost River in Hardy County, then a part of Hampshire County.

Col. Vanmeter was in charge in Hampshire County, with Lieutenant Colonel Elias Posten, second in command.

Claypole was a Scotchman and owned a large farm on Lost River. He raised a British flag on his plantation and gathered around him a large body of men who had decided that the Colonies had lost the war, and that England would be in charge at an early date. It was reported that he had a body of a thousand men under arms.

On the South Fork River, about fifteen miles up the river from Moorefield, a German by the title and name was Baron John Brake, lived on his plantation in feudal style. He was a man of considerable age, and while Claypole was the colonel in command Baron Brake was supposed to be the power and influence and wealth that was behind the Tory movement.

The first indication of Tory sentiment was that Claypole and his followers refused to pay taxes or send any soldiers to the defense of the country. Vanmeter looked into it. He took a company of minute men and marched up the South Fork to have a talk with the Baron and see if he could get the matter straightened out. When he got to Captain Stump's he sent on a body of horsemen who got in sight of Brake's and there they found a party of armed Tories, who fired upon them, and they retreated rapidly, bringing with them two prisoners.

Vanmeter sent an express to Romney to inform Posten, his second in command. Posten immediately sent to the county colonel of Frederick County asking for an army of the handy minute men to cope with the conditions. Posten said that there were so many that if he took Hampshire troops that they would be engaged in battle with their blood kin. That these Tories put their lives and fortunes in danger. That the Tories were dally daring Morgan to come and take them. So please to prevail upon General Morgan to bring four hundred men well armed and well officered and conquer the Tories. Let the mounted troops come at once and the foot as soon as possible.

Morgan was at home having been invalidated by rheumatism after the famous battle of the Cowpens, though some say that he had had a quarrel with General Greene and had been relieved of his command.

Morgan responded instantly. In a few days he was among the Tories with four hundred men, and carried everything before him. The Tories fled at his approach and while there was some firing there was no pitched battle. After they had captured a number of Tories and dispersed the rest of them, they marched to the home of the Baron. Here they found a great store of things to eat and drink. There was a mill, and a distillery, and barns, and smokehouses full of good things, and for several days they forced the rich old Baron to feed them and their horses and left the place pretty well raided. They got home in ten days having had a fine time.

That is my idea of effective service as minute men. Ready to serve but not ready to eat the bread of idleness. It is the spirit of America. It may be that the time will come when the country will realize that the name of militia has been appropriated to a select body of troops, and that the right name for the millions upon millions who hold themselves ready to respond to a call

for service will be minute men. And in the meantime remember that the reason that West Virginians are called Snakes is because of the brave flag of the minute men.

Baron Brake seems to have got away to Germany. The prisoners including Colonel Claypole filed petitions humbly showing that they had been led into error by persuasion and ignorance. Many of the proudest names in West Virginia are to be found in these petitions. Brake had numerous descendants most of them from his son Jacob Brake who was captured as a child in the French and Indian war and raised among the Indians. Some of the aristocracy of West Virginia are descended from him. A considerable body of Tories, bold hunting men, made their way up stream until they came to the divide and crossed over to the extreme headwaters of the North Branch of the Potomac, and there by one of the noblest springs in West Virginia, high up in Mullenax Gap, near the line between Pocahontas and Pendleton, they made their camp for the duration of the war that was so fast drawing to its close. A great assembly met there the other day to form a society to ask for a road between the two counties. The name of the stream from that fountain originally known as Tory Camp Run, has been changed by error no doubt to Teter's Camp Run.

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